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Web link to an itinerary: BUSINESS TRAVEL COMPUTER RESERVATIONS: Bypassing computer reservation systems may reduce customer frustrations over bookings, says Kate Rice:[London edition]

Rice, Kate. Financial Times. London: Aug 30, 1999. pg. 08

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Abstract (Article Summary)

For business travellers who use Oracle's eT-Link, a direct web-based link between companies and travel suppliers, such frustrations may become less frequent.


In contrast with CRSs' text-based technology, eT-Link can deliver full-feature, multi-video capability to the business traveller. Thus, the traveller who uses Hertz, one of the suppliers available through eT-Link, can view images showing the difference between a Chevy Lumina and a Ford Taurus.

For instance, a traveller might find the Sheraton he or she intended to stay in was booked. Right now, according to Rick Lifitz, vice-president of product management for Oracle, the only information that automatically comes on-screen on a CRS is the fact that there are no vacancies at the Sheraton. But, since Sheraton is owned by the same company that owns Westin, eT-Link can offer the customer a room at the Westin two blocks away for about the same price.

Full Text (716 words)


Copyright F.T. Business Enterprises Limited (FTBE) Aug 30, 1999

Have you ever booked a rental car for \$39 (£24) a day and ended up paying double that, thanks to airport surcharges, local taxes and vehicle licensing fees not mentioned when booking?


For business travellers who use  Oracle's eT-Link, a direct web-based link between companies and travel suppliers, such frustrations may become less frequent.


The technology allows purchasers to bypass computer **reservation** systems which were designed to sell **airline** seats and are of limited use when looking for more complicated products such as **hotels** and **car** rentals.



It also means travel suppliers can avoid what they consider to be onerous computer reservation system fees.

In contrast with CRSs' text-based technology, eT-Link can deliver full-feature, multi-video capability to the business traveller. Thus, the traveller who uses  Hertz, one of the suppliers available through eT-Link, can view images showing the difference between a Chevy Lumina and a Ford Taurus.

Not only does it calculate the total cost, including all those extra fees, it also recognises the customer (nice if you're a Gold level member) and confirms extras such as mobile phone rentals.


"From a user standpoint, you get a heck of a lot more intelligent information," says Valerie Cordell, director of corporate travel at  Oracle, which as well as owning eT-Link uses it for its own travel arrangements.

"It will substantially reduce the complaints about rates we get with  Hertz because people don't understand about various charges that are sometimes out of their control, particularly on taxes and surcharges in cities like New York and Boston." eT-Link's greatest strength may be its partnership with Pegasus, the company that includes most of the world's big hotel chains and has amassed an impressive hotel **database** independent of computer reservation systems.


For instance, a traveller might find the Sheraton he or she intended to stay in was booked. Right now, according to Rick Lifitz, vice-president of product management for  Oracle, the only information that automatically comes on-screen on a CRS is the fact that there are no vacancies at the Sheraton. But, since  Sheraton is owned by the same company that owns Westin, eT-Link can offer the customer a room at the Westin two blocks away for about the same price.

If the corporate client has negotiated guaranteed room availability, eT-Link makes that process automatic. eT-Link also contains maps showing a hotel's location and a complete list of amenities, something difficult to do within a CRS.

With international flight bookings, e-Travel can show travellers the difference between the First Class and Business Class cabin - a function that airlines are intensely interested in, according to Mr Lifitz.

Travellers do not have to do anything special to use eT-Link - the service is designed to be part of  Oracle's automated booking tool, and is transparent to the end user - what the user sees on-screen is similar to what he or she would see on any travel web site: graphics and point-and-click technology.

Company travel policy is built in, and the system lists suppliers with which companies have negotiated preferred agreements. eT-Link also offers direct links to Continental Airlines and  Amtrak and is negotiating with other travel suppliers.

However, direct connections such as eT-Link or  Andersen Consulting's Via Worldwide Networks, may never replace computer reservation systems. For one thing, CRSs provide a huge amount of information in a marketplace where suppliers and buyers meet.

While eT-Link charges only \$1-\$2 for connecting suppliers with customers - much less than a CRS fee - travel managers will want to be sure its distribution model is effective.

Another potential problem with bypassing a CRS is the question of whether a travel agent can pull up a business traveller's full itinerary if something goes wrong.

Nevertheless, the threat of eT-Link is enough to make computer reservation systems consider the prospect of altering their pricing.

"Right now it's sort of a novelty and something that the CRSs aren't going to re-engineer themselves to compensate for," says Scott Smith, vice-president of sales and marketing for Sabre BTS, the business travel services arm of a CRS that began as a division of American Airlines.

"But if it becomes big enough, you can bet that all of us can figure out a way to be compensated for the services we provide." Copyright Financial Times Limited 1999. All Rights Reserved.

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